

**Please delete the section entitled Brief Description of the Drawings and  
replace the deleted section with the following replacement section including  
brief descriptions of new Figs. 9, 10, and 11. A marked up version of the  
replacement section is attached hereto.**

**Brief Description of the Drawings**

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The foregoing features of the invention will be more readily understood by reference to the following detailed description, taken with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 shows a block diagram of an embodiment of a method in accordance with the present invention for facilitating bilateral and multilateral decision-making;

Fig. 2 shows a block diagram of a further embodiment of a method in accordance with the present invention in which conjoint analysis is employed;

Fig. 3 shows a block diagram of an embodiment of a system in accordance with the present invention;

Figs. 4 and 5 illustrate the logical flow of a method according to an embodiment of the invention, that may be implemented using a web server on the Internet;

Figs. 6 and 7 are histogram representations of a preference profile of a party who is a job applicant and of a counterparty employer in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

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Fig. 8 presents a side-by-side comparison of the preference profiles of Figs. 6 and 7; and

Figs. 9, 10, and 11 are screenshots demonstrating hierarchically structured questions organized into three stages in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

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By contrast with conventional methods, embodiments of the present invention enable a bilateral evaluation of preferences: a decision is recommended based on its providing a relatively close fit between the preferences of each potential pairing of party and counterparty to a potential transaction, when compared with other possible pairs of parties to the potential transaction.

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Indeed, embodiments of the present invention may likewise be employed when information about preferences is provided not just by two parties to the transaction (a party and a counterparty), but also by at least one co-evaluator, who provides a useful perspective on the preferences of a party or a counterparty. In this case, the evaluation is multilateral rather than bilateral.

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In this connection embodiments of the invention may employ conjoint analysis. See for example, Cattin, P. and R.R. Wittink, "Commercial Use of Conjoint Analysis: A Survey", 45 *Journal of Marketing* 44-53 (No. 3, Summer, 1982), and "Commercial Use of Conjoint Analysis: An Update", 53 *Journal of Marketing* 91-96 (July, 1982); Green, P.E. and Y. Wind, "New Way to Measure Consumers' Judgments," *Harvard Business Review*, July 1975 ("Green and Wind"); see also the references identified in the extensive bibliography of Patrick Bohl: *Conjoint Literature Database CLD*, University of Mainz, Germany, 1997. The foregoing articles and references are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

**Please delete the paragraph starting on Page 22, Line 26 and replace the deleted paragraph with the following replacement paragraph removing references to Tables 4-6 and adding references to Figs. 9-11. A marked up version of the replacement paragraph is attached hereto.**

In one particular embodiment, the questions are organized into three stages. In the first stage, the respondent ranks the levels of each attribute, in descending order of preference. For example, "1" could signify the most preferred level, and "3" the least preferred level, for three possible levels of an attribute. In the second stage, the respondent is asked to rate his or her degree of

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preference for the most preferred level of each attribute, over its least preferred level; for example, the degrees of preference could be "1, slightly preferred"; "2, moderately preferred"; "3, greatly preferred"; "4, I must have - the least preferred level would be upsetting." Finally, in the third stage, a series of two-option choices is given to the respondent, forcing the respondent to express the degree to which he or she would prefer one of two multi-attribute combinations. For example, the respondent could be presented with option A and option B, each having different levels of two attributes, and asked to rank them on a scale of 1 to 9 (1 meaning "strongly prefer option A", 5 meaning "the two are equal," and 9 meaning "strongly prefer option B"). Examples of questions from each of these three stages are shown in Figs. 9 through 11.

**Please delete the section entitled Abstract and replace the deleted section with the following replacement section placing the abstract in an acceptable form.**

**A marked up version of the replacement section is attached hereto.**

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Techniques for evaluating the closeness of fit between various parties and counterparties utilizing bilateral and multilateral decision-making are disclosed. For each party, questions intended to reveal the preferences of the party are presented to the party and/or a co-evaluator for the party, and a preference profile is derived for the party based upon the responses to the questions. For each counterparty, questions intended to reveal the preferences of the counterparty are presented to the counterparty and/or a co-evaluator for the